

The Founding of the
Memorial Hall Library

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THE FOUNDING OF THE
MEMORIAL HALL LIBRARY
ANDOVER, MASS.


By MARY BYERS SMITH

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Smith, Mary B

The founding of the
Memorial Hall Library.



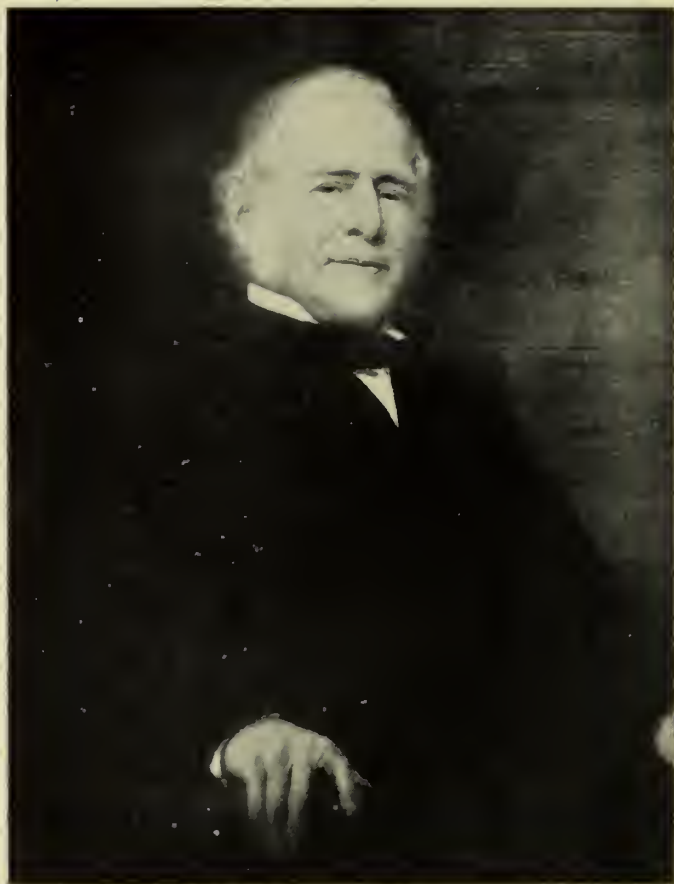
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JOHN SMITH

From a portrait by Edgar Parker, in possession of Miss Mary Byers Smith

THE FOUNDING OF THE
MEMORIAL HALL LIBRARY
ANDOVER, MASS.

By MARY BYERS SMITH

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THE FOUNDING OF THE MEMORIAL HALL LIBRARY, ANDOVER.

BY MARY BYERS SMITH.

"On the 18th of April 1861,—six days after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, and three days after the proclamation of President Lincoln calling for 75,000 Volunteers, . . . a meeting . . . was held in the Hall at Frye Village . . . to see what could be done towards organizing a company of some sort, for the purpose of becoming familiar with military drill."¹

John Dove was chosen chairman and John Smith headed the list of those making "remarks." What those remarks were, it is not difficult to imagine. For many years he had been thinking and talking about little else. He had always held a radical and uncompromising position on the freedom of the slaves. Twenty one years before in 1840, he had gone through the unhappy experience of an open quarrel with his pastor over what Mr. Jackson called the "Anti-Slavery Fuss." He had stayed away from church for three months and had then voluntarily "repented," finding himself, at a meeting in Boston, in the wrong camp and temporarily bewildered by violence over forms of freedom from which his conservatism recoiled. A short time after his return, Mr. Jackson preached for three hours one morning on the ideal aspects of human freedom and, in the afternoon, spoke on practical questions affecting the Southern States. He wrote to his father that he felt well pleased with his handling of the difficult topic. But he adds in a postscript: "Deacon Smith has been over to see me and talked the whole forenoon. He thinks I preached good abolition in the morning and in the afternoon upset it all."²

In this same year Mr. Smith was appointed a delegate³ from the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and, I think, attended a Convention in London of the Friends of Free-

1 Record of Andover During the Rebellion.

2 Jackson Letters, Memorial Hall Library

3 Garrison Letter. M. B. S.

dom Throughout the World. Six years later, he was a leader in the group of forty-four who seceded from the West, South, Methodist and Baptist churches to form the Free Christian Church, dedicated to the radical and, I may say, very unpopular anti-slavery cause.

Throughout the period leading up to the Civil War, John Smith had been in correspondence with anti-slavery leaders such as Phillips and Garrison and had personally assisted in the escape of slaves. My mother has told me of the excitement and pleasure of the Donald home which was a way-station in the "Underground Railway." Mysterious people used to arrive late at night to be housed and fed, calling at John Smith's early in the morning for their tickets to Canada.

Years before that meeting in the Frye Village Hall, John Smith had seen a slave-auction in the South and ever after had a vivid picture of what was meant by a fate worse than death. He believed that the freedom of the slaves was a cause worth fighting for and when the fight started, he must have felt a certain responsibility for having done everything in his power, little though that was, to bring it about. Knowing something of his high-spirited and adventurous youth, I feel sure that it was with regret that he contemplated his sixty five years and his inability to bear arms. His "remarks," therefore, must have been solemn, thoroughly informed and full of his faith in the eventual triumph of the right.

After the war, in April 1866, the Town voted to raise the sum of \$4500 for a soldiers' monument.⁴ The money was put aside and almost forgotten. It is not even mentioned in the *Record of Andover in the Rebellion*. But it was to come to the rescue of the Building Committee of the Memorial Hall Library and to associate the Library for all time with the idea of freedom.

For the Library was not a gradual development from the Frye Village Library nor influenced directly by the earlier Social Libraries in the town. Free public libraries were springing up sporadically all over the country but were not in touch with each other. The Chicago Public Li-

⁴ Raymond. Minutes.

brary opened its doors the same year that we did. We preceded the formation of the American Library Association by six years.⁵ Why was this? The answer, I think, is supplied by my grandfather's travels.

During the war he had been very busy as active head of the Smith and Dove Co., supplying the army with linen thread for boots and saddles. In 1865 he took a short vacation on board a sailing vessel. In 1870 he was advised by his physician to take an extended rest. With his wife, his daughter Mrs. George Coburn, and her husband, he sailed for Europe. It was his sixth visit to his native Scotland and his second to the Continent. They were conscientious sight-seers. And, as none of them spoke any foreign language, they engaged the services of a most efficient courier, a Swiss named Ludi. The family were abroad for over a year during which Mrs. Coburn kept a detailed diary. It is possible, therefore, to follow the little party from day to day as they calmly skirted the Franco-Prussian War.

Mr. Smith had been depressed and discouraged when he left home, and it may well have been more than a personal matter with him. The Grant Administration registered an all-time low in American history. Civic corruption, bad manners and greed were rife. An irresponsible press kept scandal alive and did little to elevate public opinion. It was a relief to Mr. Smith as to most Americans of that time just to sail away from the noise, dirt, and squalor of sprawling, over-grown New York.

I now quote from Mrs. Coburn's journal:

(Berlin). Thursday, June 20th. (1870) Cloudy and some showery. Father went to walk before breakfast and got lost and we were very anxious and nervous as he was $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour behind time and we were glad enough when we saw him coming down the street with two men. He did not know the name of the hotel or street and altogether had quite an adventure. After breakfast we took a carriage and drove around the city. In the hall (of the Old Palace) which we first entered, the guide opened a large wooden box and took out some cloth slippers which the gentlemen were obliged to put on over their boots. The floors are all highly polished. There

⁵ Bostwick. The American Public Library.

was quite a large company and they looked queer enough scuffling along. . . .

To understand Mr. Smith's enthusiasm for modern Berlin, it is only necessary to remind ourselves that the Crown Princess Frederick, Victoria and Albert's "Vicky," was living there at that time, and that she and her husband had been able to put into motion many of the minor social reforms devised by Albert and accepted by the orderly and docile Berliners. People of Scottish descent as well as Victoria's neighbors in Balmoral accepted Victorian ideals as their own and on the whole approved of Albert's energetic and Spartan notions of education and domestic economy. Through letters, visits to Scotland, and the *Brechin Advertiser*, Mr. Smith had a personal interest in the English Royal Family and was prepared to admire the practical results of "Vicky's" influence.

This is the same day:

We drove through some of the principal streets passing many public buildings and palaces of Princes—The Arsenal—Library—University—Market—The Theatre with a church on either side. We drove along the side of the Thiergarten, the park of Berlin, passing many nice private residences with pretty gardens in front. . . . we visited the porcelain manufactory. . . . we next visited the Museum. . . . sculpture-galleries—picture-galleries. On the ground-floor is a complete museum of Egyptian Antiquities said to be as fine as any in Europe and comprising every imaginable thing which the Egyptians could have used. . . . we looked until we were worn out and then went back to the hotel. . . . George and father went to walk. After much discussion we finally decided to go to Potsdam.

Friday, July 1st. Took the train for Potsdam at 10 a. m. arriving about 11. This is the Versailles of Berlin. We drove to the New Palace, so-called. A part of the year it is occupied by the Crown Prince. The Princess had just been confined here so we could not go in at the principal entrance. . . . (The Royal infant was the Kaiser's younger sister Sophie Dorothee, afterwards Queen of Greece.) We went through the library—the books still in the cases—saw some of the King's own works with criticisms in Voltaire's handwriting. We walked in the gardens of "Sans Souci." The walks at the top of each terrace were lined with orange trees—some

of them over 200 years old. Below was a fountain and around this immense basin were eleven groups of statuary and between them circular marble seats, where we sat and rested, wondering if kings and queens had ever sat there and if their place had indeed been to any of them "Sans Souci."

Saturday, July 2nd. After breakfast we took a little walk down the street on which our hotel is situated which is called Unter den Linden from a double row of lime trees in the centre. It is very wide and one of the handsomest streets in Europe. Berlin is a very nice city and the great intellectual center of northern Germany... We left at 11 o'clock for Dresden... Arrived at 5 p. m.—drove through the old part of the city and across the bridge to the Hotel Bellvue where we found rooms on the first floor leading out into the pretty garden and on the river Elbe which divides the city. *Found letters waiting us from Andover.*

On this same day John Smith wrote the letter which might be considered the birth of the Memorial Hall Library. (To his son Joseph) "You mention in your last letter received here that there was nothing yet done with the lots up town where the buildings were burned. I have thought the corner lot, where Joseph Abbott's shop stood, would be a fine place for a Memorial Hall to be built upon . . . to keep in remembrance the names of those who gave up their lives in defending our flag and saving my adopted country to God and Liberty." He then proposed to head a subscription list for the purchase of land and building and an endowment "to take care of the Library, if there should be one, and a Reading Room. . . . It appears to me if the people of Andover would take this matter in hand, and all give according to their ability, the thing might very soon be done." His pledge was to be good for six months.

Apparently he said nothing about this plan to his traveling companions and they went on their way despite rumors of war. With your permission, I will quote one more passage from the journal—really a digression, but interesting as a footnote to history.

Baden Baden. July 15. We heard France had declared war against Prussia. Discussed the subject of going to Strasbourg and finally decided to go.

July 16. A day long to be remembered, having an end we little dreamed of in the morning. We left Baden between eight and nine—intending to be back in season for tabled’hôte. We knew war had been declared but anticipated no immediate trouble. At the station we met Mr. and Mrs. Dexter who were frightened at the prospect and were off for Switzerland. We were three hours in reaching Strasburg delayed, as we afterwards learned, by the war troubles. We took a carriage at the station and drove to the Hotel de Ville de Paris, had lunch and then went to see the Cathedral. Strasburg is quite a German town in appearance although it belongs to France, was taken by Louis 14th, in 1681. Its fortifications are very strong. We saw the library building. I think it is the most valuable in Europe and has 100,000 volumes. When ready, we went back to the station to take the 1 o’clock train to Baden. We waited beyond the usual time and could get no satisfactory answer why. When we had waited nearly an hour a lady spoke to mother in French and I answered that she spoke only English which she was very glad to hear as that was her own language. She said someone had just told her that no more trains were going out of Strasburg as orders had come from Paris to stop all communication with Germany. We didn’t believe it at first, but were soon obliged to. Our next thought was to get across the bridge to Kehl and take the cars on that side. We took a carriage and drove with all speed to the river, trembling as we passed out of the fortifications for fear we should be detained. It was a ride I shall never forget. All along the way we met carriages, and all said you need not go on, for there is *no passing*, but we thought our passports might do for us what others could not do. It was very dusty, and the artillery were thundering by us and it seemed to me we were on a battle field. It was a terrible two miles. When we reached the river we found it strongly guarded and a great crowd of people who were in the same predicament with ourselves, wanting to cross and couldn’t. Ludi saw the chief of the guard who said he would be glad to let us pass but that it was impossible as they were taking up the bridge, and sure enough there were the French at work on one side and the Prussians on the other taking up the bridge as fast as possible. It was a sorry sight to us. We drove back with all possible speed, trembling lest they would not let us through the fortifications. I was thankful for so much. Our next attempt was to get to Switzerland if possible. We found a train left at 4½ so we went to the

hotel and had some dinner. Ludi hadn't money enough to take us there but father had fortunately taken a little gold in the morning... Our letter of credit was in Baden with the rest of our things. We were sorry we could not help the two English girls. Their friends were in the Black Forest and they like ourselves had come to see the Cathedral. We could only take our tickets to Mulhauseu, our going on depended on the train from Cologne. All along the road the most intense excitement prevailed—people were crowded about the station to hear the news. We arrived at Mulhausen at 9 and waited half an hour... were nervous enough when they did not let us out of the waiting room, were glad enough when we were safely in the cars and more pleased when we were safely arrived in Basle at 11 o'clock although we could find no place to sit much less sleep until we had been to five hotels and then managed to get one room with two *single* beds but after awhile we got another. The greatest excitement prevailed in Basle—2000 people had been driven in by the war that day. I think I shall remember this day as long as I live. It has been a great tax on the nervous system. The landlady gave mother and me some nightdresses—little piquè sacks.

Sunday, July 17th. Geo. and Ludi started early in the morning for Baden Baden to get the baggage... Went out with father and mother a little way. The streets full of soldiers coming in to guard the frontiers and so much excitement was glad to get back. Has been a terrible day to me.

Monday, July 18th. Pleasant and very warm. Geo. and Ludi came back at 1 a. m... I was *thankful* when I heard George's voice outside the door... They had a trying time getting there and little time for packing but the chambermaid helped them... They brought all the baggage and I didn't much care if everything was packed on top of my best dresses. Mother and I had a general repacking and in the p. m. had a general drive, crossed the Rhine and visited the Cathedral.

Tuesday, July 19th. Left Basle and arrived at Zurich at 11 a. m. Had beautiful views all the way—high hills and pretty villages. Glad to be in Switzerland, a free country with pure air—glad to be going beyond the sight and sound of war.

The journal continues to the first of October, when the travellers had reached London. They spent the winter in Edinburgh and in the spring Mr. Smith visited his birth-place, Brechin, Scotland, and was presented with the freedom of the city.

On his return to Andover, after a little over a year, he was given a public welcome and reception at the town hall. "Seats were reserved for the young ladies of the Abbot Seminary and the lads of Phillips Academy who marched down in procession and the Lawrence brass band had been engaged by the workmen in the Smith and Dove Mills and a procession . . . of nearly three hundred soon entered the hall crowding it to excess." As all the speeches were centered about the Memorial Hall project, it is appropriate to go into these details. Mr. Smith's most significant remark was this: "I tell you, Gentlemen and Ladies, we don't begin to know what the worth of this great struggle has been to the world. Go into Europe, and instead of pointing to you as a slave-trading nation, they are looking to you for liberty there, for principles; and they are calling now for the flag, the American flag,—for the American flag is the flag of the world." (Applause) The Memorial Hall Library was off to a grand start.

Meantime, since July, 1870, several committees had been active. Mr. Smith's letter from Dresden had been presented to the town by Moses Foster on August 1, and a committee of seven was appointed to attempt to raise the necessary funds. The names of these first committeemen were: Francis Cogswell, chairman; Charles Smith, Samuel H. Taylor, Solomon Holt, William G. Means, Samuel Raymond and David Middleton. 655 subscriptions totalling \$52,757.70 were received and still the fund was about \$3500 short of what was needed. Then it was that buried treasure in the form of the soldiers' monument was thought of. The town promptly appropriated this \$4500 to complete the fund.

Land was purchased and a building committee appointed: Rev. John L. Taylor, chairman; William G. Means, David Middleton, and Rev. Charles Smith. Mr. Middleton was requested to procure an inexpensive drawing of the ground plan of the building submitted to the committee by Mr. George H. Torr. An additional fund of \$3000 for the purchase of books was given at this time by Mr. John Byers of New York in memory of Peter Smith Byers, first Principal of the Punchard Free School.

On May 27, 1871, it was voted to employ Mr. J. F.

Eaton as architect and the contract was awarded to Abbott and Jenkins for \$27,750. In the cornerstone, laid on September 19, was a list of all the Andover men enrolled in the Army and Navy during the "War of the Rebellion" and of the forty-six "who gave up their lives in the service of their country."

At the annual town meeting in 1872, the first board of Trustees of Memorial Hall was appointed as follows: Henry Boynton, E. Kendall Jenkins, Rev. James H. Merrill, David Middleton, Samuel Raymond, Rev. William L. Ropes and Joseph W. Smith. On the resignation of Mr. Merrill, a month later, Rev. Francis H. Johnson was elected in his place. During the summer of 1872, the Trustees purchased 2700 books "for the foundation of a library" of which Mr. Raymond made four catalogues by hand. On May 1, 1873, Mr. Ballard Holt, 2nd, was appointed librarian and janitor.

The Hall was formally opened on May 30, 1873. After a dinner at the Elm House, to which a large group of guests had been invited, a procession, escorted by returned soldiers and the Andover Brass Band, marched to the South Church for appropriate exercises. James B. Smith acted as chief marshal and Governor Washburn sent as his representative, Col. George L. Ripley of his staff. The address by Phillips Brooks was printed and widely distributed.

We are greatly indebted to Samuel Raymond, our first secretary, for his full and legible records. I have read all the letters and papers preserved by him which give in great detail the transactions of the early years. I have examined all material connected with my grandfather's life including an unpublished manuscript biography by W. B. Makepeace. I am convinced that my grandfather's feeling of debt to the soldiers so recently dead was a sincere and burning one and that the Library was not just a pet project with a war memorial as an excuse. As for the Library itself, I have quoted my aunt's diary at some length partly to give a little portrait of my grandfather in his later years, but mainly to show the European influence and background of the *idea* of a library in his mind. It is obvious that he appreciated the advantage to the com-

munity of ready access to books and of "suitable rooms of large size" in which to consult them.

Some of you undoubtedly know that when my grandfather came to this country in 1816, he brought with him a shilling, a Bible and his machinists' tools. He had gone to work as a herdsman on Catterthun near Brechin at the age of nine and had been the chief support of his widowed mother since he was about fourteen. Naturally, he himself had no schooling to speak of. He had, however, great respect for learning and a perfectly modern appreciation of the possibilities of adult education. He had been able to overcome his own early handicaps; why shouldn't others, if only the books were available? To his mind it was as simple as that. He often spoke of the good fortune for the whole family that his brother Peter, as a weaver in Glasgow, "sat beside a good man who lent him books."

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